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OBSERVATION OF A YETI IN THE HIMALAYAS OF TIBET

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(Translated by Dmitri Bayanov)

INTRODUCTION

In September of 1991, in the Himalayas, the author observed and photographed, at a considerable distance, a human-like animal which may have been a Yeti. As a specialist in biogeography and a biologist by training, the author is not disposed to reaching a definitive conclusion regarding the nature of the observed animal, but he thinks the incident warrants publication of this report.

As a member of the (then) Soviet-Chinese Glaciological Expedition, the author worked in Tibet for three months, from August to October, 1991, visiting many regions of the Tibetan plateau and the Himalayas, including the environs of Mounts Qomolungma (Everest), Xixiabangma, Choja, and several others. It was on one of these routes that the author had the Yeti encounter described below.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

In September, 1991, the Expedition worked on the northern, southern, and southeastern slopes of Mt. Xixiabangma. On the day of the encounter, our small group had worked in a spot some 25 miles (40 km) from the settlement of Nyalam, on the Nepal-China border (Fig. 1). The group consisted of four scientists from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), five specialists from China, and two Tibetan yak drivers. We worked at altitudes of 15,700–16,700 feet (4,800–5,100 m) above sea-level, in a transition zone between high-elevation steppes and the glaciers; this zone is interspersed with shrub growths and rock debris.

The continental montane climate of the region is characterized by cool summers with precipitation, and cold, snowless winters. From November to April, there is practically no precipitation. The rainy season lasts from July to September, when temperatures rise to 50–59°F. (10–15°C.) in the daytime, and fall to 21°F. (−6°C.) at night. Forests occur some 30 miles (50 km) from the area, at altitudes below 12,500 feet (3,800 m).

On September 22, 1991, I was en route to a glacier on the southeastern slope of Mt. Xixiabangma. About midday, on the top of a moraine ridge at

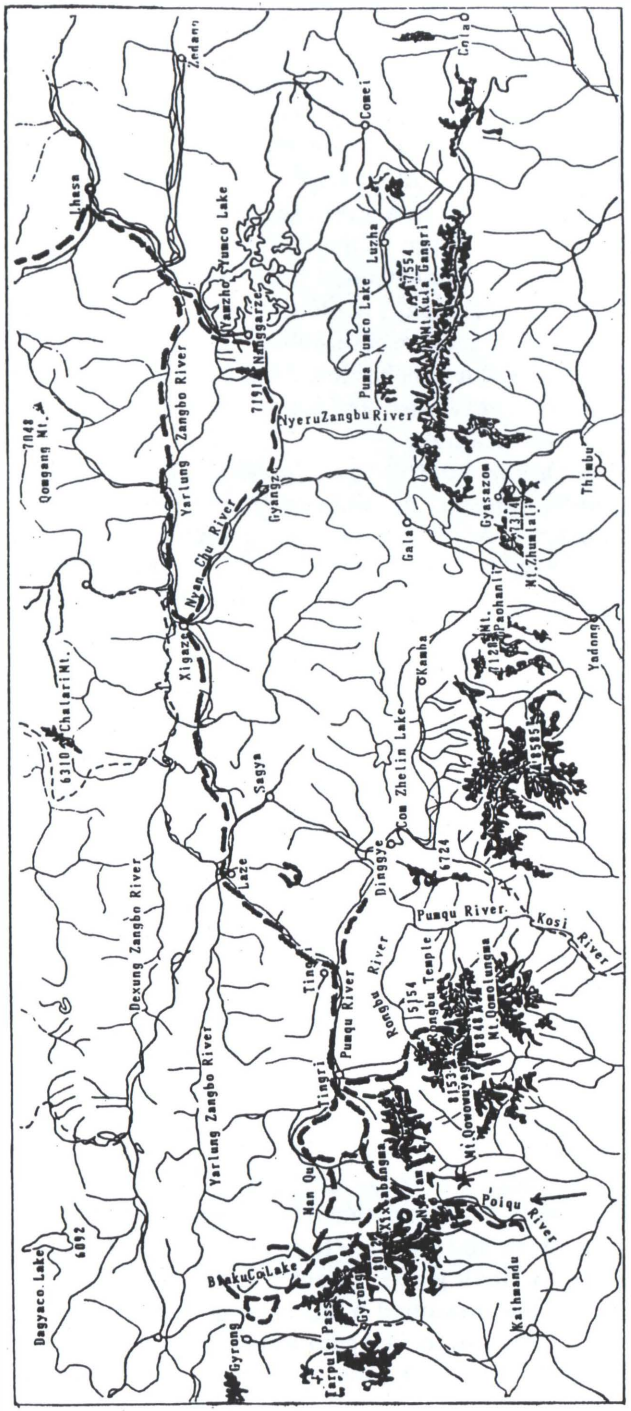

FIG. 1.—Map of routes and fieldwork of the Soviet-Chinese Glaciological Expedition, Tibet, 1991. Circle (lower left) indicates the site of Yeti encounter.

a distance of about 400 feet (120 m), I noticed a human-like animal sitting by a boulder on the sunlit side (Fig. 2). My position was lower on the slope, and at first I did not see the full silhouette. A little later, however, I observed the animal in full. It had the following characteristics: erect, bipedal posture; dark brown color; cone-shaped head; no visible neck; long forelimbs; and short and slightly flexed hindlimbs. When first observed, the creature was squatting in what seemed an unnatural position for an animal, with its back touching the sun-warmed surface of the boulder. It was a rare moment for this altitude and season, when sunshine floods the mountains, and nature comes alive after a cold morning. I could not identify what I saw. My very first impression was of a creature resembling a monkey, a dog, or a bear. But its anatomy, its subsequent behavior, the great absolute elevation of the place, and the distance from forests and settlements made me conclude that I faced a different kind of animal.

Tempted by the natural interest of a biologist, I bent down and started stalking the creature, skirting the boulder on the left-hand side (Fig. 3). However, the attempt proved unsuccessful: the noises I made apparently startled it, as it appeared from behind the boulder on two feet and, slightly bending and helping itself along with a fore-limb, moved behind another (and bigger) boulder. I do not think it saw me, and presumably only reacted to the noises I had made.

I then remembered that I had a camera in my bag, a Soviet-made Zenit-TTL (with no telephoto lens), and that an attempt could be made at photographing the animal. After adjusting the camera to the right setting, I began to approach the boulder. The intended maneuver remained the same: rounding the boulder from a position somewhat lower on the slope, and observing the creature from a closer range. I tried unsuccessfully to take the first photo from a distance of 330 feet (100 m)—maybe more—at a moment when the sun appeared from behind a cloud. To see the whole of the animal, I straightened up, but the effect of photographing from "below" (see Fig. 3) was bound to distort the image. When its full silhouette appeared in the viewfinder, the animal turned its head toward me and began watching me. I then became frightened, and dared not even move at first. Finally, I turned and ran down the slope.

Because of the high altitude, I quickly tired, having covered no more than 1,000 feet (300 m). My colleagues were at a still lower elevation, walking along a stream. They did not react to my yells and arm-waving because of the noise of the stream. To descend and cross the stream to join them would have been quite an effort, and contrary to my objective, which was to reach some moraines near a small glacier about 6 miles (10 km) from the spot where I encountered the presumed Yeti. Having assessed the situation, I decided to return and attempt once again to photograph the animal from a closer range. For this purpose, I took off my bright-colored jacket, and,

FIG. 2.—View of the landscape at Yeti encounter site. Arrow (center) indicates precise encounter location.

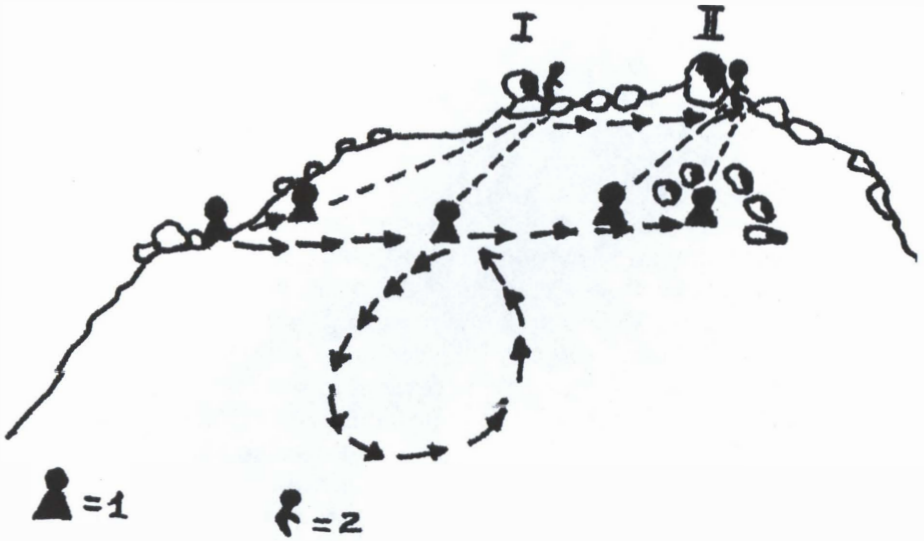

FIG. 3.—Positions of author (1) and Yeti (2) during encounter and photography.

leaving behind all unnecessary items, ascended the slope again, crawling toward my destination. On the first attempt, I miscalculated the distance, and stood up far from the object of photography. The sun came out again, and I took the first photo. The creature kept squatting and rising, and peering from behind the boulder. I could only see it when I stood up full height amidst the boulders. Hiding behind them, I resumed crawling, approaching the animal from the right-hand side (see Fig. 3).

A second photographic attempt was more successful, and I took three photos almost one after another. Then, keeping the animal in view, I began approaching it. The creature, alerted, bent down and looked towards me. I stopped, but it was too late; the animal moved behind the boulder, and presumably descended down the other side of the slope. When I reached the boulder, the animal had disappeared, and was not seen again.

Later that day, after my regular scientific work, I returned to the site of the encounter, and thoroughly examined the terrain within a radius of 2,600–3,300 feet (800–1,000 m). My findings were as follows:

1) Three large niche-shelters were found, which could have been used by the animal during the warmer time of the year (Fig. 4). The substrate was of a kind that did not show tracks, but it was disturbed, thus indicating that the niches had been used.

2) Feces resembling human coprolites, but darker, were found in two places, separated by a distance of about 330 feet (1,000 m); one sample (Fig. 5) was near the place of the encounter. The feces contained the remains of plant tissues, probably roots of plants of the genus *Saussurea* and others.

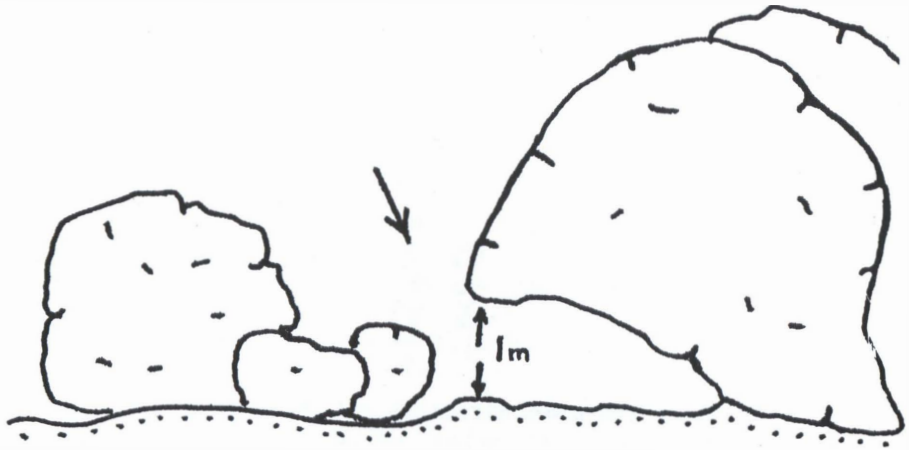

FIG. 4.—Illustration of niche, possibly used as a shelter by the Yeti.

3) On the slope of southern exposure, at an altitude of 16,100 feet (4,900 m), there were spots of dug out soil, 8 × 8 inches (20 × 20 cm), and up to 4 inches (10 cm) deep, with marks of bitten-off upper parts of roots and other underground plant organs (Fig. 6). It can be said with a high degree of probability that these were not the result of feeding activities by rodents or other known animals.

FIG. 5.—Presumed Yeti feces; 4 inches (10 cm) in length, and 1 inch (2.5 cm) in diameter.

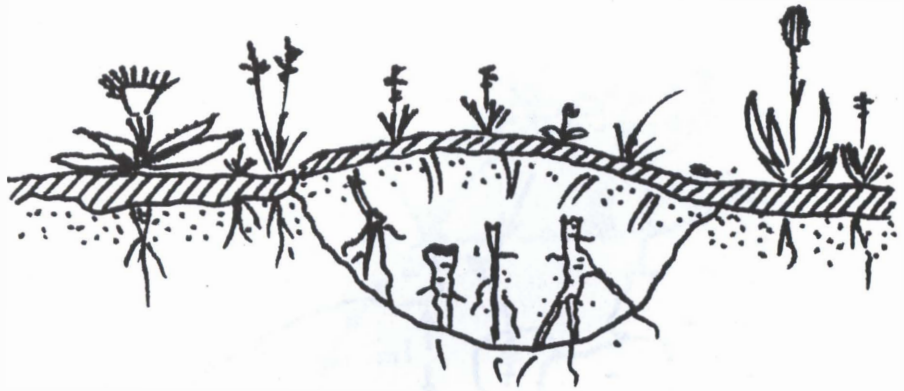

FIG. 6.—Illustration of dug-up roots that had presumably been bitten off by the Yeti.

4) Measurements of the boulder next to which the animal had been observed showed that its height in a slightly bent posture could not have exceeded 4 feet, 7 inches (1.4 m).

The questions I addressed that evening to the yak drivers were to no avail, as the Tibetans were reluctant to discuss any matters at all through the Chinese.

Two days later, the Expedition left that area, and after three days of travel and work in a neighbouring valley, returned to the base camp near Nyalam, on the Lhasa-Katmandu route. A month later, after difficult motor rides and hikes on foot in Tibet, we arrived in the city of Liangchou. Here, in a talk with the director of the local Institute of Glaciology and Geocryology, we learned that my Yeti encounter was not the only one in that area. Earlier, in the 1960's–1970's, during the first Chinese glaciological expeditions in the area of Mt. Xixiabangma, Chinese scientists are also said to have found evidence of the Yeti's presence at great altitudes, and reportedly had even attempted to catch one.

RESULTS

My observations of a human-like creature lasted, with interruptions, about one hour. Finally, presumably disturbed by my presence, the creature disappeared. I managed to take four photos with a Zenit-TTL camera, equipped with a regular lens, on ORWO color slide film (made in the former East Germany), from a distance of about 260 feet (80 m). The landscape and the feces were photographed on black and white film. The films were developed when I returned to Moscow. The results, alas, are insufficient as convincing evidence of the sighting: the silouette of the creature in the photos is only observable through great magnification, about ×100–200, with the inevitable result of emulsion grains blurring the image.

The creature's "profile," based on my observations, is as follows:

1) The head is not big; it is cone-shaped, and is covered with dark-brown, apparently, short hair.

2) The neck, due to hair cover, was not visible, the head appearing to sit right on the shoulders.

3) The shoulders are sloping and narrow. The arms are long, and, when they are folded, the elbows jut out; when extended, the arms reach below the knees.

4) The legs are short, and a little flexed; on the knees, the hair is flattened or worn off.

The creature moves swiftly enough on two legs. It may occasionally take shelter in niches under big boulders, concealing the entrance with smaller boulders and stones. Shelters of longer duration may exist in more hospitable forested areas. During the summer and autumn period, it feeds, apparently, mainly on plants, including roots and other underground organs of alpine grasses. Its feces are of a dark, almost black color, containing plant fibers, and resembling human coprolites.

FUTURE PLANS

The author plans to continue his professional work devoted to the study of Himalayan vegetation dynamics. He has no direct plans connected with the Yeti problem. However, learning from experience, the author will be alert and better prepared for a possible new sighting of human-like animals occurring in the mountains.